



THE MENACE OF POLITICAL PARTY VIGILANTISM IN GHANA

REFLECTIONS FROM ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS HELD IN TAMALE, NORTHERN REGION

Media Briefing addressed jointly by Sheikh Arimiyawo Shaibu, a CODEO Advisory Board Member and Mr. Albert Kofi Arhin, CODEO National Coordinator held on Wednesday, July 12, 2017 at Nim Avenue Hotel, Tamale, Northern Region

Salutation

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen from the Media

Introduction

On behalf of the Advisory Board of the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), I welcome you to this media briefing about political party vigilantism in Ghana. We are grateful to you for honoring our invitation.

Background

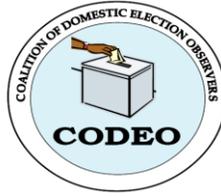
As you may be aware, the phenomenon of political party vigilante groups and their activities have gradually found its way onto the centre stage of Ghana's electoral politics, particularly under the Fourth Republic. Over the years, the level of violence that has characterized the activities of party vigilante groups during each phase of the electoral cycle has increased, especially since the 2000s. The 2016 Presidential and General Elections of Members of Parliament were without exception. The immediate post-election phase also witnessed some incidents around the political transition, nearly marring the almost smooth process. Unfortunately, the manifestations of political party vigilante groups have continued from the transition and into the governing period.

At its post-election national stakeholder workshop, held at Aqua Safari Resort in Ada in the Greater Accra region from March 27-29, 2017, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) made this subject of political vigilantism one of the pressing post-election issues for discussion and deliberation. This was in recognition of the danger that political party vigilante groups pose to the country's electoral politics and democratic development.

CODEO's stance on political party vigilantism

In a communiqué issued on April 6, 2017 in Accra after the post-election stakeholders review meeting, CODEO condemned this growing feature of the country's electoral politics. CODEO further called on political parties to disband these affiliated groups. It urged other stakeholders, particularly the security agencies, to address this growing menace. Specifically, CODEO stated that,

- The existence of political vigilante groups is illegal and the Ghana Police Service should ban and disband these groups immediately as a matter of national security.



- The leadership of the NPP and the NDC who are largely responsible for the emergence of these groups in the fourth Republic should own up to their responsibilities and work together with the police to disband all politically affiliated vigilante groups.
- In the medium to long term, there should be a concerted effort amongst key election stakeholders to make the Inspector General of Police independent by insulating him/her from political interference by securing his/her tenure across regimes and ensuring such appointments are transparent and consultative.

Going forward

In order to sustain the conversation on ridding the country's political space of party vigilantes and their activities and to prevent the matter from being overshadowed by other governance developments, CODEO is embarking on a nationwide public engagement through Regional Roundtable Discussions on this growing phenomenon. This series of public engagement, made possible with the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) seeks to create awareness of this phenomenon, and thereby contribute to civic and voter education on it. These engagements will also be used to collate views from regional level stakeholders on the phenomenon that will be used to develop comprehensive policy recommendations for stakeholders and relevant institutions to implement.

The third in the series of the Regional Roundtable Discussions was held yesterday, Tuesday July 11, 2017 at the Nim Avenue Hotel in Tamale in the Northern Region.

The following observations were made by participants during the discussion:

- There is growing mistrust of the security services, which stems from their inability to enforce the laws against groups, which commit criminal offenses.
- There is increased suspicion and mistrust among political parties arising from the fear of manipulation of the electoral process by their opponents.
- There is the desire on the part of political parties to win political power at all cost without recourse to established rules and regulations governing elections.
- Political parties indirectly mobilize and fund vigilante groups but shy away from publicly associating themselves to their criminal actions.
- Political parties feel insecure because of inadequate state protection when carrying out their activities during election. This is used to justify the formation and use of vigilante groups.
- The President under the 1992 Constitution wields too much power especially with regards to the appointment of heads of state institutions. This constitutional weakness promotes patronage politics and encourages party vigilantism.
- There is too much political interference in the activities of state agencies especially within the Police Service that disables their ability to tackle the menace of party vigilantism.
- State agencies with special reference to the Police Service are not adequately resourced to handle the complexities of vigilante activities.



- Contest for superiority and the edge to win political power leads to the formation of more vigilante groups.
- There is a lack of clarity on the definition and concept of vigilantism. Participants agreed that not all youth groups are combative and criminal in nature.
- The Youth bulge and high levels of youth unemployment especially, graduate unemployment in the region was observed by participants as one of the causes of the increased youth group formations, which are recruiting grounds for party vigilantes.
- Vigilantism encourages the proliferation of arms and influence communal conflicts.
- Party vigilantism breeds indiscipline, even within political parties.
- There are inadequate platforms for youth involvement in decision making and their involvement in development process within parties and the society.
- There is a deficit in civic and voter education on voting process and civic responsibilities.

With regards to finding lasting solutions to the phenomenon of party vigilantism, there was consensus among participants that:

- A National Security Summit should be organized to deliberate, and develop actionable plans to tackle identified threats to the state's security including tackling party vigilantism.
- Establish an independent body to appoint heads of security agencies and all heads of security agencies must be given security of tenure.
- Decouple the Ministry of Justice from the Attorney General's Department.
- Adequately resource the Police Service to be able to combat criminal activities by these vigilante groups.
- Political parties should openly admit the existence of vigilante groups and stop clandestinely patronizing their services.
- Name and shame political party leaders who support and patronize the services of vigilante groups.
- Revive the Regional and the District Inter-Party Dialogue Committees.
- Actively involve the youth in decision making processes and make them relevant in the governance of the state.
- Conscious efforts should be made to solve youth and graduate unemployment.
- Improve voter and civic education with the aim of increasing civic consciousness.
- Families should take more interest and responsibility in raising their children.
- Religious leaders must use the pulpit and any other platforms available to them to reform the moral aspects of their followers.

Conclusion

As you may know, CODEO's primary and broad objective is to complement the efforts of Ghana's Electoral Commission and indeed all stakeholders in ensuring transparent, free, fair and peaceful elections in the country. CODEO will continue to advocate for peaceful and credible elections during and in between elections. CODEO calls on all stakeholders, including the political parties, security agencies, and the public at large to as a matter of urgency, address this growing menace. CODEO calls on all



Ghanaians to work together to support this crusade against political party vigilantism in our electoral politics. CODEO further calls on the media to make this subject critical for public discussion and urge them not to allow this matter to disappear from the public discourse until it is eradicated.

Finally, CODEO acknowledges the generous support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for supporting CODEO's post-2016 election activities.

Thank you and God Bless Ghana!!!

Signed by:

Albert Kofi Arhin, National Coordinator, CODEO

Dated: Wednesday, July 12, 2017.

About CODEO and Election Observation in Ghana

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) is an independent and non-partisan network of civil society groups, faith-based organizations, and professional bodies, which observe Ghanaian elections. It was established in the year 2000 under the auspices of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) to mobilize citizens of Ghana to actively participate in the electoral process and to complement the efforts of Ghana's Electoral Commission in ensuring transparent, free, fair and peaceful elections. With twenty-two founding organizations in 2000, CODEO currently comprises 42 organizations (*See CODEO Brochure for the list of CODEO member organizations in your folders*) CODEO has become a platform for citizens and groups to participate in the Ghanaian democratic process. CODEO is a member of the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM). CODEO is also a founding member of the West African Election Observers Network (WAEON).